DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 024 623 SP 001 840

By- Kruszynski, Eugene

Some Thoughts on Practice Teaching.

Pub Date Nov 68
Note- 6p.
Journal Cit- The Teachers College Record: v70 n2 p133-138 Nov 1968
EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.40
Descriptors- *Cooperating Teachers, *Professional Recognition, Status Need, *Student Teachers, Student Teaching, *Supervisor Qualifications, Teacher Educators, *Teacher Morale

If the needs of the student teacher are to be met, he must be regarded as "a thinking, reacting, growing, and changing near-professional person." This, however, can not occur if his teacher supervisor has unwillingly accepted his own supervisory position, having been pushed into it by administrative pressure. The teacher supervisor who accepts such assignment with unvoiced unwillingness is himself not a free individual. It follows that, excluding those who actively seek the task of supervising student teachers, "those who accept student teaching supervision are automatically less qualified than are those who reject such assignments." To be fully effective, teacher supervisors must possess "an honest, positive, and unequivocal desire to participate." To obtain volunteers of this quality, the conditions for such work must be enhanced. Money is the most obvious enhancement: returns in improved teaching would be well worth the extra financial expenditure. (SG)

ED0 24623

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

Some Thoughts on Practice Teaching

Eugene Kruszynski
San Francisco State College

Teacher education has been the target of volumes of criticism by academicians, teachers in service, foundation sponsored subject matter specialists, peripatetic experts with and without portfolio, journalists, and the general public, not to mention educationists themselves. Such criticisms have been directed toward every aspect of teacher training, including questions of the necessity for any "professional" training at all, the emphases assigned to liberal arts and professional segments, the number and composition of requirements in areas of specialization, the number and kind of professional requirements, and the temporal priorities within sequences.

There has been, however, little if any criticism leveled at one part of the future teacher's curriculum—practice or student teaching. On the contrary, this course, a virtual standard in all teacher preparation programs, is the beneficiary of near universal acclaim by all, including student teachers themselves. So widespread has been the acclaim that documentation of the many laudatory statements regarding its usefulness, value, and necessity seems unnecessary for the specialized reader; others may examine the literature on the subject. Now this situation, which finds a preponderance of people who concern themselves with the subject in general agreement, has the unfortunate effect of limiting the total amount of critical attention paid to student teaching, and that largely to internal matters of organization, precedence, and procedure. There is concern for the proper length of such experiences, efficient allocation of available time, assignment to major and/or minor areas, placement of curriculum and instruction or methods courses, proper role of student teacher *vis-a-vis* his teacher supervisor, co-curricular duties, and the like. Little direct attention, however, has been given to the student teacher as a thinking, reacting, growing, and changing near-professional person.

He and his feelings are generally taken for granted as his professional development is guided and channeled towards a fairly predictable goal. His entire and all too brief career is described and molded, not unlike the chapters

Professor Kruszynski, of San Francisco State's Department of Secondary Education, here confronts an aspect of the student teaching problem which has seldom been discussed. He is concerned with the unwilling "master teacher," who takes on his assignment out of conformity and fear. His point is that the supervising teacher who feels free and knows he has "rights" is the only one who can be effective with the student teacher assigned to his charge.

November 1968, Vol. 70, No. 2

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY Teachers College Record

TO ERIC AND ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING UNDER AGREEMENTS WITH THE U.S. OFFICE OF EDUCATION. FURTHER REPRODUCTION OUTSIDE THE ERIC SYSTEM REQUIRES PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNER."

SP 000 818

in standard student teaching texts; from "orientation" and "observation" to "job application," closely followed by the NEA Code of Ethics. Lip service is paid to the necessity for uniqueness and true professional development, as contrasted to mere carbon-copy apprenticeship performance, although his behavior at the end tends to resemble rather closely that of the long grey line of which he is soon to be a member. Consequently, the "new" teacher we seek to develop to meet the challenges of a cybernated, urbanized world with its accompanying technological and human imperatives seldom emerges as a product of our direct training. I not only maintain the general accuracy of this description, but deplore and challenge the necessity for it. In my opinion, the traditional practice teaching procedures and practices, together with the subjective measures of growth used, mold the novice into patterns of conforming behavior which tend to suppress and gradually extinguish individualism and tendencies toward innovation. In short, the system itself does not encourage nor reward divergent thinking and behavior, and the insecure, harassed, and gradually disillusioned student is soon conditioned and conditions himself to react properly in acceptable modes of action.

The Trauma of Reality The bulk of practice teaching programs are cooperative arrangements between colleges and public schools, with the latter providing the classroom and pupils in which the student teacher practices his theory and art under a supervising (frequently referred to as "critic" or "master") teacher's direction. To this setting, with its established political and social structure, the student brings his knowledge, attitudes, and idealism, fresh from the challenging, inquiring, optimistic atmosphere of the college campus. And it is here that he quickly discovers the rigidities of a reality defined by an educational bureaucracy represented by a supervising teacher. The key to student teaching success is, of course, the master or supervising teacher; and fortunate indeed is the student assigned to one who not only knows how a master teacher behaves but who acts like one. Assuming the general adequacy of most supervising teachers where subject matter is concerned, experience, and teaching technique, I wish to concentrate on two seldom-considered factors: namely, the supervisor's attitude towards his assignment, and its implications for that difficult-to-measure requirement of professional behavior—intestinal fortitude.

The Unwilling Supervisor It is my contention that the supervisor who brings to his task anything less than wholehearted willingness dooms the arrangement to mediocrity at best, and frustration and cynicism at its worst. That such is all too frequently the case is

largely a consequence of the numbers involved. The typical teacher education institution must inevitably seek the aid of school administrators in the assignment of students to teachers; and, although college supervisors participate in such assignments, the master teacher selected knows where the power lies. School administrators, by reason of the experiences peculiar to their role and function, tend to equate the teacher's verbal acquiescence with genuine interest and positive feeling, and frequently fail to appreciate the significance of the alternatives which are available to him. The teacher, spending his life evaluating the behavior of others, not unnaturally expects his actions to be evaluated as well, and is likely to weigh seriously the possible effect of refusal on his future professional success and career. The facts of professional life suggest that significant numbers of teachers consent to student teacher supervision when their unexpressed desires are to the contrary. Teachers are generally not quite sure just how free they are, and as a result they generally behave as though they are not. This is the heart of the matter. More important than whether or not teachers are indeed free is the unfortunate fact that too many think they are not and behave accordingly.

Our student is thus frequently assigned to an insecure, conforming teacher who either accepts the assignment as part of the "natural order," who sees it as the only choice open to him, or who submits to power while involving the student (perhaps unintentionally) in his resultant conflict. Is it not predictable that the directive influences upon the student will tend to elicit similar responses? If we are to assume that student teachers learn such things as classroom organization, techniques of control, planning, and methodology, and an increased sophistication regarding content presentation and evaluation in their practice, are not these learned under supervision? And is not the supervising teacher in effect teaching himself to the student? It seems inescapable that these relatively objective behaviors will be taught within a context of expectations, attitudes, feelings, and responses peculiar to that teacher, and that these (including, perhaps, the idea that cynicism is normal) will also be learned to some degree.

Learning the Supervising Teacher My point here is not that the student teacher will inherit, adopt, or learn the attitudes and behaviors of such a supervising teacher *in toto*. Rather it is that prolonged exposure to the performances of an insecure, conforming teacher will burden the student with a load of internal conflicts and so affect his interpretations of the role of a teacher as to inhibit intelligent professional development or postpone it indefinitely. (It must be recognized that except for their student teaching experience, most teachers seldom if ever again have

an opportunity to observe another's teaching performance, and certainly not to any significant extent. From then on their notions of how others teach are based on personal statements, hearsay evidence, or fragmentary interludes—all lacking that empirical element which is essential to meaningful comparison and self-evaluation. The most vivid example of teaching performance for most is that observed during practice teaching; even previously-held opinions of earlier instructional practices undergo reinterpretation in this new light.) The crucial effect of the supervisor's attitudes and behaviors is due not to mere knowledge of them by the student, who will resort to considerable second-guessing anyway, but to their evidential and coercive nature in the act of supervision. The requirements and directions given, the plans and procedures approved, the techniques suggested, and the standards recommended all represent choices among alternatives open to the supervisor. In short, his attitudes and beliefs receive expression within the context of the kind of teaching he rejects, permits, prefers, or insists upon in what is ultimately HIS class.

It is precisely his own sense of security that will determine the degree of freedom granted his student, not the rigidity of district, school, and course requirements. Secure teachers, conforming to personally tested notions of good teaching rather than to intramural image protection, generally find or even create their own freedom, and can be expected to favor similar behavior in their student teachers. Neither success nor failure is viewed as a threat. Teachers doubting the existence of this freedom seldom find it. Can they be expected to guide student teachers in the search, exploration, and exercise of what is virtually *terra incognita?* Obviously, much of what any teacher does is necessarily conforming behavior. The significance here is less in the act itself than in the quality of thinking which leads to, supports, and/or justifies the act. The quarrel is not with responsible behaviors which happen to be conforming and which have been validated through critical thinking. It is, however, with the converse: conformity in the many discretionary areas where expediency triumphs over integrity, and rationalization supplants reason. The degree to which a teacher increasingly exhibits the latter behavior marks him as a conforming teacher, one who is in effect practicing role-destruction in the abdication of the responsibility which is his. It seems extremely unlikely that passive acceptance of student teaching supervision would be an isolated conforming act by a teacher who otherwise practices thoughtful, independent behavior. Such a decision, however, would be a rather predictable response by one whose general pattern of behavior would tend to accommodate with relative ease one more "yes" to a growing inventory of unenthusiastic assents.

Dilemma and Paradox The true nature of the dilemma is now apparent, a strange paradox wherein those who *accept* student teaching supervision are automatically less qualified than are those who reject such assignments. From this there seems no escape. Other things being equal, and omitting those who actively *seek* such thank-less tasks, assenters automatically disqualify themselves by that very act, since possession of security and intestinal fortitude would have counseled refusal. The absence of this *sine qua non*—GUTS—the significant differentiating factor which marks the true professional in all fields of endeavor, renders one unfit to initiate teacher recruits competently. A teacher lacking this crucial attribute is psychologically incapable of instructing student teachers in attitudes and behaviors which have been allowed to atrophy in him through disuse or design. Such a supervisor's maximum effort could not exceed the mere description of secure teaching as an abstraction, a quality of which he did not approve and could not represent. To do more would require self-denial and the revelation of a career based upon deliberate approximations or hypocrisy.

Is this pure hyperbole, simple exaggeration of a case wrenched out of proportion for some private purpose? I think not. Its validity is grounded in the fact that teachers are responsible for their total performance, including relations with and responses to their immediate staff superiors. No one of sound mind would maintain that principals and other administrators possess total wisdom insofar as school business is concerned, and yet many teachers (and administrators) evidence such beliefs in their practice. The net result is a kind of dictation by default, a process of reverse or mutual indoctrination, to which any student teacher is a daily witness. School administrators have the right and duty to criticize in their area of responsibility, and the right to expect similar actions from others, especially those whose duties include supervision. Only then can intelligent, healthy, and honest growth take place to the advantage of the educational enterprise. The teacher who wants desperately to ask "why" or to say "no" has the right and the duty to do so; and the onus, incidentally, is on the administrator to encourage such behavior. Anything less is not only less than professional, but ineffective and destructive of morale and the quality of teaching and learning. A teacher must know that he has the real option of saying "no" before his "yes" can mean anything at all; and callousness to this reality will not escape the sensitivities of student teachers under his charge.

Implications for Practice Teaching What then is the implication for practice teaching, the culmination and proving ground of teacher education programs? Simply that the primary criterion to be

used in assessing the qualifications of prospective student teaching supervisors must be an honest, positive, and unequivocal desire to participate. In short, volunteers rather than conscripts are required if quality is the goal. The apparent paucity of volunteers is an indication of negative conditions rather than a measure of their true availability. We have but to enhance the conditions for such work (largely an administrative matter), and might begin with the obvious: money. Heretofore conscripts have been called into this service for the most part; and, although many have labored long and hard, such successes as they have achieved have been in spite of rather than because of the system, and their debilities have been situational rather than personal. In other human activities it is not custom or pure formality that governs the selection of volunteers to achieve objectives under difficult conditions, but rather a concern for positive results and efficiency. Conscripts may seem to get the job done, but only in a general or statistical sense, and at excessive cost. In the teaching of teachers such costs may indeed be viewed as general in nature, but they are also particular and qualitative, since each of those (mis)taught share some portion of the total loss. Few are likely to escape unscathed, and fewer still aware of any handicap. Many factors involved in the pairing of students with their supervisors are not only difficult to measure but impossible to control: this one is not. Every student teacher has the right to an assignment with one who also has rights—and knows it.